

[Help](#) | [Home](#) » [Theravada Text Archives](#) » [Thai Forest Traditions](#) » [Ajaan Lee](#)

Starting Out Small

A Collection of Talks for Beginning Meditators

Portfolio 2

by

Phra Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo
(Phra Suddhidhammaransi Gambhira-medhacariya)

**Translated from the Thai by
Thanissaro Bhikkhu**

Copyright © 2003 Metta Forest Monastery

For free distribution only.

You may print copies of this work for your personal use.

You may re-format and redistribute this work for use on computers and computer networks,
provided that you *charge no fees* for its distribution or use.

Otherwise, all rights reserved.

See also: [Starting Out Small](#)

Contents

- [Thinking About Death](#)
 - [Coming Ashore](#)
 - [Right Action, Right Result](#)
 - [Clean & Clear](#)
 - [Genuine Practice, Genuine Knowing](#)
 - [Living in Peace](#)
 - [Feeding the Mind](#)
-

Thinking About Death

Every human being falls under the same conditions. In the beginning we're born, then in the middle we change, and in the end we fall apart and die. Death is something no one aspires to, and yet no one can escape it. We all have death at the end of our path.

Thinking about death gives rise both to benefits and to harm. For shortsighted people it's harmful, because it makes them so depressed and discouraged that they don't want to do any good in the world. In other words, all they see is the part that dies. They don't see the part that doesn't. Actually, there are two parts to every person: the part that can die and the part that doesn't die. For example, the nature of the body is to keep changing until it falls apart. You can say that it dies, and you can say that it doesn't. The word "dies" applies to the fact that the person disappears from his or her friends and relatives, but the elements of the body simply go back to their original form. The earth returns to being earth, the water to water, the fire to fire, and wind to wind. It's like a cube of ice: if you keep the ice long enough, it'll return to its original condition of being water. So you can say that the body dies, and you can say that it doesn't die -- simply that it doesn't maintain the same form it had. According to the conventions of the world, this is called death, but wise people don't see death as anything strange or out of the ordinary. The only question is whether death is accompanied by merit or not.

This brings us to the mind that used to stay with the body. This is the important part because it doesn't die. It simply changes in line with the way good and evil arrange things for it. In other words, they arrange the level of the mind, the place where it takes rebirth. If you do good, you'll have to go to a good destination. If you do evil, you'll have to go to a bad destination. If you develop goodness to the ultimate degree so that you can let go of good and evil, the mind will become changeless, or what's called deathless. But most of us can't conceive of the truth. We tend to overlook it, so that we never reach the deathless. This is because of our own stupidity and lack of discernment. Our ignorance hides the truth from us.

The nature of the mind is very subtle. You can't see it with your eyes. Some people say it doesn't exist, which is why people who don't consider things carefully say that death is followed by annihilation. We can make a comparison with the fire element in the air. The mind is like the fire element. The body is like a lit candle. When the candle runs out of its wax and wick, the fire has to go out. But when the fire goes out, that doesn't mean that no fire is left in the world. We're able to light another candle because of the fire element still there throughout the air. That's the way it is with us: when the body falls apart, the mind gives rise to a new level of being for itself as long as it still has the fuel of ignorance, craving, and clinging.

This is why the Buddha taught his disciples not to be heedless, to develop as much merit and skillfulness as possible, for merit and skillfulness are what bring happiness both in this world and in the next. This is in line with the sayings,

sukho puññassa uccayo: the accumulation of merit brings well-being;

puññam sukham jivita-sankhamhi: merit brings well-being at the end of life; and
puññani para-lokasmim patittha honti paninam: merit is what establishes living beings in
the next life.

The word merit here means the happiness or wellbeing that results from doing good. The good we can do comes in many forms, but in short there are two kinds:

- (1) the merit that acts as a cause, i.e., the good we have to do; and
- (2) the merit that acts as a result, i.e., the happiness coming from our goodness.

The merit that acts as a cause comes in three types: *danamaya*, the merit of being generous; *silamaya*, the merit of observing the precepts; and *bhavanamaya*, the merit of meditating. In the Abhidhamma these three types are divided into ten meritorious activities. Generosity is expanded to include *pattidanamaya*, the merit of dedicating merit to others, and *pattanumodanamaya*, the merit of appreciating other people's merit. These three go together in that they all counteract jealousy and stinginess. The merit of observing the precepts is expanded to include *apacayanamaya*, the merit of showing respect to people worthy of respect, such as our elders and those to whom we should be grateful; *veyyavaccamaya*, the merit that comes in helping others in skillful activities, sharing your strength, wealth, and intelligence. These three all go together in that they're related to interpersonal virtue. As for the merit of meditation, that's expanded to include *dharmassavanamaya*, the merit of listening to the Dhamma; *dharmadesanamaya*, the merit of teaching the Dhamma; and *ditth'ujukamma*, making one's views straight. All four of these go together in that they are all sources of discernment.

These forms of merit can arise only when they are rooted in mental states free of greed, aversion, and delusion. As the Pali says, *alobho dana-hetu*, lack of greed is the basis for generosity; *adoso sila-hetu*, lack of aversion is the basis for virtue; and *amoho bhavana-hetu*, lack of delusion is the basis for developing the mind in meditation.

The merit you do gives you ease in body and mind. Whenever you think of the good you've done, it will always make you happy. It's a noble treasure that follows you, just as your shadow follows you at all times. Even when you die, the merit you've done will follow you and arrange a good place for you to be reborn. This is called *puññabhisankhara*, merit as a fabricating factor.

When people are about to die, they are like travelers getting ready to abroad. Before they go, they have to prepare themselves. Only then will the trip be comfortable. For example, they have to put money in the bank, exchanging their Thai currency for foreign currency so they can use it when they're abroad. If they simply take their Thai money along with them, they won't be able to use it to buy anything. In the same way, when people leave this world at death, they can't take along their wealth or possessions to use in the next world. Instead, while they're still alive here, they have to deposit their money in the bank for Buddhists and exchange it for noble treasures, or inner wealth. What this means is that they make donations, for example, in homage to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. That way they'll be able to use

their wealth in the next world. If they have only counterfeit money -- i.e., if they've done nothing but evil and unskillful things -- they won't be able to go to anywhere comfortable or prosperous, because they lack the funds needed to take themselves there. They won't be able to return to the human world because they lack the funds -- the human values -- needed to take themselves there. So they'll have to turn into hungry ghosts, wandering around, losing their way, haunting people and possessing them, suffering all kinds of hardships. For this reason, being generous is like depositing your money in a bank so that you'll be able to use it when you go abroad. That's the first step.

The second step is to get a passport as proof of your nationality. What this means is that you establish yourself in the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, observing the precepts to get rid of the gross defilements in your words and deeds, as proof of your status as a member of the Buddha's following.

The third step is to learn foreign languages. In other words, you have to practice tranquility meditation and insight meditation so as to get rid of the intermediate and refined defilements -- the Hindrances -- in the heart, straightening out the heart so that you can give rise to three forms of knowledge:

pubbenivasanussati-ñāna, the ability to remember previous lifetimes;
cutupapata-ñāna, knowledge of the death and rebirth of living beings, seeing why they are born on low levels or high, with pain or pleasure; and
asavakkhaya-ñāna, the knowledge enabling you to rid the heart of its fermentations.

These three forms of knowledge count as the foreign languages you'll need for your journey. Your trip will be easy and fun, dazzling bright, with plenty of treasures along the way. You'll see sights you've never seen before, such as the heavens and brahma worlds. This is what it means to be "well-gone." Even as you stay here, you'll stay well. If you want to come back, you'll be able to. If you don't, you can continue your studies and go all the way to nibbana, released from having to swim around in the cycle of death and rebirth. You'll reach security, joyful and free from danger of every sort.

The practice of generosity, virtue, and meditation thus results in three types of treasure -- the treasure of the human state, the treasure of the heavenly state, and the treasure of nibbana -- in line with your abilities to do the practice. People who are complete in all three of these forms of skillfulness are said to go well, come well, and stay well, because their thoughts, words, and deeds have been trained well. Wherever they go they are free from animosity and danger, for they are loved and respected by all beings, human and divine.

So we should each look at our condition, realizing that we're on a journey leading day by day, minute by minute, to death. There's no escaping this. For this reason we should develop the three forms of skillfulness and merit -- generosity, virtue, and meditation -- so that the happiness and security resulting from goodness will arise for us, taking us beyond death, in line with our abilities

Coming Ashore

June 28, 1959

The Dhamma is something that cleanses the mind so that it's bright, clean, and happy. People differ in their temperaments: some are crude, others intermediate, and others refined. This is why the Buddha elaborated on the Dhamma in various ways in line with the character of his listeners. In other words, he took short things and explained them until they were long. For example, sometimes he'd explain the rewards of generosity, sometimes the rewards of virtue, and sometimes the rewards of polishing the heart: what's called meditation. But his real aim was to teach people to make their minds pure. Everything else was just elaboration.

Each of us human beings is like a person sitting in a boat in the middle of an ocean filled with wind, waves, and storms. Some people are floating so far out they can't even see the shore. Some are bobbing up and down, so that sometimes they see the shore and sometimes they don't. This stands for the people who are repeating *buddho, buddho*. Some people are floating closer to land, so that they can see the fish traps, the sailboats, and the green trees on shore. Some have struggled to swim closer to shore, but they still haven't made it to land. As for the Buddha, he's like a person standing on the shore, free from all the dangers of being at sea. He's seen the dangers that people are subject to, which is why he has the great compassion to want to help us get out of the sea and safely on land. This is why he teaches us to practice generosity, virtue, and meditation, for these are the things that will pull us safely on to shore.

When we set our minds on practicing the Dhamma, we have to set our sights on the Dhamma's true aim. Don't go wandering off in other directions. You have to know which path is the wrong one, the dangerous one; and which one is the right one, the safe one. It's like steering a ship across the ocean. The captain has to watch for the signals of the lighthouse. Or you can make a comparison with driving a car: The traffic police have their red, yellow, and green lights as traffic signals at the major intersections. If, when the signal has its red light on, you don't stop, then if you keep on driving there's bound to be danger, and you're sure to get pulled over. If the green light is on but you don't go, that's wrong, too. This is why when you're driving you have to understand the signals so that you'll reach your destination safely.

It's the same when you're traveling to the Dhamma. You have to know the Buddha's traffic signals. His red lights are his prohibitions, the things he doesn't allow. Anyone who lets his or her boat or car go through the red light will have to meet with danger. So while we're meditating here we have to make sure we don't go through the red light of our defilements.

The Buddha compared our defilements to fire. The heat of our single sun can make the world as hot as it is. Think of how hot it would be if there were five or six suns. The defilements around each of our senses are like the heat of the sun. *Cakkhum adittam*: the eye is a mass of fire. *Sotam adittam*: the ear is a mass of flame. *Ghanam adittam*: the nose is a mass of fire. *Jivha aditta*: the tongue is a mass of flame.

Kayo aditto: the body is a mass of fire. *Mano aditto*: the heart is a mass of flame. Don't let these six masses of fire burn you. Normally the sensual desires arising around the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind are red masses of flame burning away at the heart. If, while we're meditating, we stick our minds into these preoccupations, it's like taking a burning match and sticking it into some kerosene or gasoline. For this reason, while you're meditating, don't stick your mind into the affairs of your family, your home, your belongings, or absolutely anybody or anything at all. This is the Buddha's red light, where he tells you not to go.

The other signal is the green light, the Dhamma being explained. When the light is green, that's a sign for you to go ahead. The green light here stands for the Dhamma you've already studied, as well as the Dhamma you're training yourself in right now. When the light is green, then whether we're fast or slow, we have to go. Don't just loiter around and block the way, or the police will arrest you. In other words, when the Dhamma arises by way of our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind, we have to pursue that goodness.

The Dhamma is what pushes or pulls as to goodness and peace. The green light is the Dhamma arising in a heart that's clean and pure. Right now, have our minds entered the quality of *buddha*? This is an important point. We have to be observant to see whether the affairs of our minds are heading toward the green light or toward the red light. If we're not heading in the right direction, we have to turn ourselves around. It's like picking flowers, washing them, and then putting them in a vase. We have to make sure there aren't any worms or caterpillars eating away at them. Make the mind like a pure, blooming lotus in a vase. This qualifies as the quality of *buddha*. Or think of it in another way: the mind is cool and refreshed like a lotus blooming in the middle of a pond. It's surrounded by nourishing water, cool and with an appealing scent. If you're sitting here in the meditation hall without any hindrances in the mind, it's like a lotus in the middle of a pond. This is also called the quality of *buddha*. This is called the radiant mind, or in simpler terms, the quality of inner worth. When the mind is saturated in inner worth like this, it's happy and at ease.

The Dhamma is a preoccupation that gives the mind a sense of rapture, fullness, and ease. When it arises, we're taught to develop it and cultivate it as much as possible. Keep the mind in this preoccupation until it attains a state of oneness: that's the Dhamma. Whatever is good in the heart, we try to raise that goodness to a higher and higher level. Keep evaluating it, focusing your mindfulness on it at all times, to see how the mind enters into this state of goodness. This is called developing a foundation of mindfulness.

If you keep your mindfulness focused on a single path -- as when you think *buddho, buddho* -- without sending your mind off on other paths, the mind grows deeper and deeper into a state of inner worth. Just as when we walk along a path on the ground: if we keep walking back and forth on the same path, it's bound to get worn smooth. The grasses and weeds will die away, and the path will get worn deeper into the ground, to the point where, when it rains, it becomes a watercourse, watering our crops, so that they grow abundant. We'll be able to sell them for a living and grow rich, freed from poverty. This is why this quality of merit or inner worth is called noble wealth.

Things deep and refined tend to be high in quality. If the breath is refined, the mind refined, and mindfulness refined, then the brightness of our awareness will spread wider and wider, like the electric lights that spread their light throughout the capital. This is different from lantern light, which -- if we want to see all around us -- we have to carry and run around. When the mind is refined and the breath is refined, we'll be able to know the breath energies throughout the world. We'll see how things are going with all the elements. The heart will grow even broader, so that our foundation of mindfulness becomes the great frame of reference. The mind grows even deeper and cooler. More full and rapturous. Blooming and at ease. When the mind matures in this way, you've got noble wealth. You're no longer poor.

Coolness is like water. Wherever the ground has water there are bound to be fish, crabs, crayfish, and shellfish, grasses and vegetables, all of which can be converted to wealth. The Buddha saw the fullness of this mind state, which is why he told the monks, "Don't farm for a living. Don't get involved in receiving gold and silver. Focus on doing only one thing -- be intent on really practicing the Dhamma, making your minds into the single, unified path -- and then whatever you want, you'll be sure to get. This is because when the mind is full of virtue and Dhamma, you'll always have wealth."

This is the power that comes from making your goodness deep -- like the Chao Phraya River, which is deeper and broader than any other river in Thailand. It's full of everything: boats, rafts, motor boats, steamboats, big boats, little boats, so that travel and commerce are convenient. In the river will be fish, in the fields will be rice, melons, cucumbers, corn, wheat -- all of these things will be within you. You'll be wealthy in everything. If you don't give rise to goodness, then no matter what, you won't be wealthy. This is why the Buddha taught the monks, "Don't be farmers or merchants. And don't worry, you won't be poor. Simply build up a lot of goodness in your hearts, and all forms of wealth will come flowing your way on their own."

But we don't really believe him. We believe our defilements instead, and so our minds keep sliding toward red masses of flame rather than to the clear mass of purity. This is why we're taught, *sukkam bhavetha pandito*, the wise person develops the clear Dhamma of purity.

All I've mentioned so far deals with the qualities of the Buddha and Dhamma.

The quality of the Sangha means making the mind go forward without sliding back. We keep putting our mind into good shape. For instance, when the eye sees something that isn't good, our mind is in good shape. The ear hears something that isn't good, yet our mind is in good shape. The nose smells an aroma that isn't good, the tongue tastes a flavor that isn't good, the body touches a tactile sensation that isn't good, yet our mind is still in good shape. This is called *supatipanno*, practicing rightly. When we keep the mind straight on the right path, that's called *uju-patipanno*, practicing straightforwardly. When we bring the mind to the level of insight meditation, attaining the transcendent, that's *ñaya-patipanno*, practicing for the sake of knowledge. As for *samici-patipanno*, practicing masterfully, that means making our goodness even better and better. For example, when defilement arises in the heart, we have to use the Dhamma to pen it in. Defilement is like a rabid dog running around in misery. Whoever it

sees, it runs right up to bite indiscriminately, until eventually it gets killed or falls down dead on its own. In the same way, when our defilements arise we have to pen them in quickly and keep them under our thumb. Don't bring them out to put them to use. Greed, anger, and delusion are intoxicants. When we're intoxicated, our minds are in the dark. When we're in the dark we stagger around, back and forth, dizzy and confused, not knowing what way to go, and as a result we never get to the destination we want.

The Buddha's green light takes us to the clear light of the qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. When we have these three gems and are sitting on the crystal throne of the seven forms of noble wealth, what suffering will we have? When we make our minds into Dhamma, the various defilements that lie fermenting in the heart will have to disappear. There will be nothing to spoil the heart. We'll be able to escape from the sea.

Once we get on land we can have all kinds of fun, for there are a lot of things we never saw at sea. It's like when we come into the mouth of the Chao Phraya River, where there are marsh trees and fresh green plants. We become enchanted and keep walking further inland to Sukhumvit Road. There we see bicycles and trucks and jeeps and pretty automobiles of different colors. This gets us even more excited, and some of us get smitten with what we see on land. In other words, we fall for the visions and signs that come in meditation. For instance, we may begin to remember previous lifetimes. If we remember bad things, we become sad. If we remember good things, we get happy. This turns into craving, the desire to be this or that, and some people get really deluded, thinking they actually are the things they see.

If our discernment isn't strong enough, then whatever we see will turn into the corruptions of insight (*vipassanupakkilesa*) -- like people who get all excited the first time they see a car. They go running to the car, wanting to ride in it, wanting to drive it, but without looking right or left or stopping to take note of anything. They run right out into the middle of the road, get run over, and either die or break an arm or a leg. After all the trouble they went to in order to get out of the sea, they get deluded and put themselves in danger all over again.

Like the example that happened a few days ago. An old monk came into the monastery, so some lay people asked him where he was from and whom he wanted to meet. He told them, "You all don't know a thing. Ajaan Lee used to be King Asoka, which is why he built Wat Asokaram. I'm King Pasenadi the Kosalan, his old friend. That's why I've come to visit him today." He had his student come in to inform me, and so I told the student, "Quick. Quick. Go back and tell him to go away. He's absolutely forbidden to come in here." Even this sort of thing can happen. This is called getting smitten with being on land, i. e., falling for the visions you see. That old monk probably had a few ideas of one sort or another arising in his mind, and so got carried away.

If you start seeing things when your discernment isn't strong enough, it turns into a corruption of insight -- as when a person gets excited at the sight of a car because he's never seen one before. He wants to ride in it, to drive it, so without looking left or right he goes running toward it, right into the middle of the road. And so he gets run over by a car and killed, or else crippled with a broken leg. This, too, is a kind

of delusion, a danger.

But if our discernment is strong enough, whatever we see will turn into noble treasures (*ariya-dhana*). If we see a forest of marsh tress, we can put them to use. We can cut them into firewood to use ourselves or sell in the market. If the land is a tangle of weeds, we can clear it and turn it into fields. If we don't let it lie fallow, it's sure to yield crops.

Falling for visions is also called "skewed perception." The right way to act when you see a vision is to remember to evaluate it and then let it go in line with its true nature. Don't latch onto what you see, because all things are inconstant. If you're born poor, you suffer from your desire to be rich. If you're born rich, you suffer in looking after your possessions, afraid that they'll wear out, afraid that you'll get cheated out of them, afraid that thieves will break in and steal them. There's nothing certain or dependable at all. The same holds true with visions. So whatever you see, you have to let it go in line with its nature. Leave the trees in the forest, the grass in the meadows, and the rice in the fields. If you can do this, you can be at your ease, because you know what it's like on land, what it's like in the water, when to get in and when to get out. Once you're skilled, you can travel on water or land, at ease in every way. You can go forward or back without any obstacles. This is called *lokavidu*, knowing the world. You can stay with what you know, but you're not stuck on it. You can live in the ocean without drowning. You can live in the world without getting sunk in the world -- like a lotus leaf in the water: the water doesn't seep into the leaf at all.

Fabricated things belong to no one, have no one in charge. If you contemplate them and let go of them in line with their nature -- in the same way that you put down a knife, without holding onto it -- the mind will reach an important point: the level of the radiant mind.

Right Action, Right Result

November 11, 1958

The Dhamma is something constant and true. The reason we don't see the truth is because we're always spinning around. If we're riding in a car, we can't clearly see the things that pass near by us on the road, such as how big the stones on the ground are, what color they are. We look at trees, mountains, and fields, and they all seem to be on the move. If we've been in a car since birth, without stopping to get out and walk around on our own, we're sure to think that cars run, trees run, and mountains run. The fact is, though, that the truth and our spinning around aren't in line with each other. The running lies in us, in the car, not in the trees or mountains.

Everything that's Dhamma stays firm and constant. That's why it's called the truth. Whatever isn't true, isn't Dhamma. In the area of the Dhamma, one of the Buddha's highest aims was discernment. He wasn't just out after a sense of peace and ease, for simple peace of mind isn't really peaceful, isn't really easeful,

isn't really restful. It still has some unrest mixed in with it. The highest happiness lies above not only peace of mind, but also above discernment as well.

Most of us, when we feel at peace and at ease, tend to get heedless and careless. As a result we don't develop any discernment. We can take a lesson from the people of Japan: their land is poor, their crops grow slowly, and the landscape is full of volcanoes. As a result, the people have to exert themselves to make a living and always be on the alert, ready to evacuate whenever there's danger. This is why they're so active and intelligent, solving all their difficulties so that they can bring progress to their country. People who have it easy, though, tend to be stupid, because they have no sense of how to exert themselves to get rid of suffering.

People nowadays have studied a lot, but they're still stupid. Stupid in what way? Stupid in that they don't know how to fix their own rice, sew their own clothes, or wash their own clothes. They don't have any skills. The time will have to come when this causes them to suffer and fall into difficulties. Most of us Thai people complain that foreigners are taking over our economy, but actually the fault lies with our own stupidity. We can't even make one big toe's worth of happiness for ourselves, and instead sit staring off into the distance. Other people run and jump and do everything necessary for the sake of their happiness, but we just sit around and create difficulties for our families. Then, when we suffer, that opens the way for corruption. We get up from a meal and don't wash our own dishes or put them away. If all our discernment is in knowing how to eat, how will we ever get anywhere? This is why the Buddha taught the Dhamma both in terms of causes and results, skills and their rewards. He taught first about things that lie immediately around us. Once we put ourselves into good shape, it will spread to help everyone who comes after us. Whatever causes, whatever skills, will give rise to peace, ease, and convenience for ourselves, we have to do. The results are sure to follow.

On the good side, virtue is a cause for concentration. Concentration is a cause for discernment. On the bad side, suffering comes from craving. And what does craving come from? From our own stupidity. It's because we're stupid in so many ways that we suffer so much. When craving arises, it damages people all around us. This is why we should develop the causes for happiness and ease, so as to prevent these kinds of dangers -- for when difficulties arise, the mind will start spinning in all sorts of ways that will cause us to suffer.

For this reason you should examine yourself whenever you get the chance, at all times. If you start feeling ill at ease, you should trace back to the causes. Ask yourself, "What have I been doing since I got up this morning? What have I been thinking about?" When you try to cut down a tree but can't cut all the way through, you have to look at your machete to see if it's nicked or dull. If you try to cut the tree down with your teeth, you won't get anywhere. You have to trace back to the causes of your problems if you want to figure out how to solve them. When you do that, all your difficulties will vanish.

Knowledge has to come from the discernment we give rise to within ourselves. The lowest or weakest level of discernment knows neither causes nor results. The middle level knows results without knowing their causes, or causes without knowing their results. The highest level of discernment knows causes

before they give rise to their results. In other words, you know what kind of results you'll get from your actions. But most of us don't even know what causes we're creating, which is why the results we get aren't good at all. When we want to progress in life, we have to give rise to the causes for peace and ease. In other words, we have to practice meditation in line with the factors of the noble path.

Samma-kammanta, right action, is the cause for peace and ease. Our actions come in all sorts of forms. The way we stand is an action. The movement of the body is an action. The actions, the various kinds of work in the world, require us to run, to pick things up with our body. But in the area of the Dhamma, simply sitting still with the right intention is a form of work or action. Lying down with the right intention is a form of work or action. Sitting, standing, walking, lying down: all of our movements and postures, if done with the right intention, are a form of work or action. When our actions are right, we'll experience peace and ease. And then how will suffering come our way? The reason we suffer is because our actions are wrong. We sit, stand, walk, and lie down in ways contrary to the Dhamma. And then when we take on other work in addition to our basic actions, that work is bound to turn into wrong action as well. This was why the Buddha improved his manners in how he sat, stood, walked, and lay down, so that they were all pure in terms of the intentions of his mind. What this means is that he kept practicing tranquility meditation in all his activities. His mind had to stay with what the body was doing. If the mind told the body to do something, but didn't do it along with the body, then he didn't succeed in what he wanted to do. He couldn't let the body work on its own. The mind had to work along with the body. Otherwise, his old manners would come back and take charge of the mind.

Wrong action means thoughts of sensuality: thinking in terms of sensual objects that give rise to sensual defilements. Sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and ideas come from the body and mind acting together. If the mind then wants any of these things, that's called greed. You want them to be good, but when they aren't good in line with your thoughts, that gives rise to aversion. If you get carried away by your aversion, that's delusion.

But if you direct your thinking to the breath, that will kill off sensual desires. Evaluate your breath, and that will kill off ill will. There are two kinds of evaluation: (1) evaluating the in and out breath, and (2) evaluating the inner breath sensations of the body until they interact with the other properties of the body. When you reach this point, you forget any feelings of ill will. Once the mind and body are full, you feel a sense of ease. Rapture and pleasure are thus the results of directed thought and evaluation. Directed thought and evaluation thus count as right action. The principle of cause and effect applies to all your activities, both inside and out.

The reason we suffer is because we eat. How is eating suffering? Because we never can get full. The body isn't full; the mind isn't full. It never has a sense of enough with its preoccupations. This gives rise to hunger.

But when the mind stops worrying about eating, and instead stays with its right actions, then you can be at your ease. Sometimes, while you meditate, you focus on the cause, the sense of seclusion, without any thought for the results. Sometimes you stay with the results, *vihara-dhamma*, the ease of staying in the

home of the mind. Even though the work this requires may be difficult, you aren't worried or concerned. The mind keeps staying with its sense of ease. When you get skilled, you gain a sense of when to focus on the causes and when to focus on the results. This is called acting with a sense of causes and results. You're not stuck on any of the baits of the world. You stay exclusively with the ease of the Dhamma. Even though the work may require effort, you're not worked up about it. You do it with a sense of wellbeing.

When there's a sense of wellbeing, the mind doesn't get stirred up. When it's still in this way, liberating insight can arise. Our work turns into the work of insight. You watch the properties of sensation: when sights strike the eye, there arise feelings of liking and disliking. You watch while these things stay for an instant, disintegrate, and disappear. You see sights as properties that move. The eye is a property that moves. Consciousness -- the awareness of these things -- is a property that moves. This applies to all the sense media: they all lie under the characteristics of inconstancy, stress, and not-self. Discernment is what stays still enough to see what moves and what doesn't. And then there's a letting-go of both. That's when you see that ease on the conventional level, from the point of view of the Dhamma, is a falsehood -- for there's an ease on the ultimate level that's true.

Clean & Clear

August 3, 1957

The happiness to which every human being aspires is attained solely through the heart. Some of these forms of happiness, though, aren't clean or clear. The happiness that *is* clear and clean is the highest happiness in the Buddha's teachings, in other words, nibbana. Any form of happiness aside from this is neither clean nor clear.

For the mind to attain happiness it has to depend on the Dhamma as its foundation. This is why the Buddha taught us to become acquainted with the Dhamma so that we can put it to use in developing the goodness that brings us the beneficial happiness we want.

In what way is the practice of the Dhamma so important? It's important in that when a person practices the Dhamma it gives cool shelter (1) to the person who practices it and (2) to others at large. If the world lacked the Dhamma, there's no way we could find happiness anywhere at all. This is why we have to seek out Dhamma for the heart, because the current situation of the world is such that all kinds of events are sure to come seeping into the heart. Anything protected by the Dhamma contains the causes that will bring about happiness. Anything not protected by the Dhamma contains the causes for disturbance and unrest.

We human beings are like trees. If a tree has an abundance of flowers and fruits, thick branches and leaves, and a firmly rooted trunk that doesn't fall down in the wind, it gives pleasure to the birds who

come and live in it, to the travelers who pass by and rest in its shade. This is like a person who has the Dhamma as a firmly rooted foundation in the heart. Such a person gives shelter both to himself and to others as well. The Dhamma is like a rainy mist that keeps plants fresh and green. People protected by the Dhamma have a cool sense of ease within themselves and are able to spread and share it with others at large.

Take the Buddha as an example: When he was still a lay person, he was the son of a powerful king with great wealth and a large following. His palace was enormous. He had everything he could wish for, without the least thing lacking. But even then, he saw that this sort of happiness was like a ripe banana on a tree: there's no way it could escape from the beaks of the hawks and ravens who wanted to eat it. This is why he abandoned his great wealth and went forth in search of a happiness lasting and true -- in other words, the path to release from suffering. When he found it, he kept exclaiming in his heart, "What bliss! What bliss!" Even though there were times when he had to encounter situations that were difficult to bear -- for instance, when there were hardships in gaining food or in the external conditions of his life -- he never saw these things as troublesome in any way at all. He kept repeating to himself, "What bliss! What bliss!" to the point where he was rumored to be crazy.

Still, when he had found a happiness this true, he naturally felt compassion for the stupidity of human beings and other living beings at large who still kept themselves sunk in suffering in such a pitiful way without knowing the means for gaining release from it. Feeling this compassion, the Buddha thus wandered from city to city, village to village, to teach people the Dhamma and the way to practice by which they could release themselves from suffering and reach the same kind of happiness he had found himself. When people listened to the Buddha's Dhamma, many of them gained conviction and confidence in what he taught. So they put it into practice to the point where they attained many of the highest levels of happiness. They then brought their children, grandchildren, and friends to hear the Buddha's Dhamma, and so ever-increasing numbers of people saw the results appearing in their hearts. This is how the Buddha's teachings spread far and wide in every direction. At present, Buddhism seems to be most predominant in Thailand, in that those who respect the Buddha's teachings are found in every level of society, from the lowest to the highest. The study of the Dhamma is found on every level from the lowest to the highest. The same is true of the practice of the Dhamma: it occurs on low levels, intermediate levels, up to the highest level. The lowest levels are those of us sitting here training ourselves in meditation. The intermediate levels start with the attainment of stream-entry on up. On the highest level are the arahants. You have to be very observant to know this. There are lots of people on the low levels, but only a few on the intermediate and highest levels. The really low levels are those who want to develop goodness but whose motivation is bad. In this way our practice depends on what we want to choose: Do you want to eat leaves, flowers, or the actual fruit?

If we want the kind of intelligence that can gather flowers and fruit to eat, we have to use our discernment -- the inner brightness called the eye of the mind, or the inner eye. As for the outer eye, that's the eye of flesh. For the brightness of the inner eye to arise and see the truth, we need concentration. The outer eye keeps deceiving the mind all the time, making us see things in this way or believe things in that. This is why the Buddha taught us to develop the inner eye so that our vision can penetrate far.

There are actually two parts to each person. The outer part is the body; the inner part is the heart and mind. The outer part is like a puppet or a mannequin, built out of the elements of stress. No matter how much we fawn over it, caring for it at great expense, it won't stay with us. In the end it'll have to turn into ashes and sink into the ground. As for the mind, which is the more lasting part, we don't give it much care or attention at all. This is why the Buddha said that people are very deluded. We don't see our substantial part, and instead see only the deceptive part. We're like a monkey who sees its reflection in a mirror and assumes that there's another monkey. So it sticks out its tongue and makes faces at its reflection, trying to scare its reflection -- and so scaring itself, until it gets all worn out to no purpose at all. Our substantial part is the mind. Our fake part is the body. Even if we were to decorate the body with crowns and headdresses to make it look really fancy, it wouldn't change its basic nature. Once it's born it ages, then it starts to hurt, and then it dies. No matter how much we study and gain degrees from universities all over the world, we still can't divert the body from its basic nature. There's no way it can escape dying.

This is why discerning people focus their attention on the substantial part of themselves, in other words, the part that's responsible for all things: the mind. The body isn't responsible for good or evil at all. For example, if we murder or steal, the body doesn't go to hell. No matter how much good we do, the body doesn't go along with us to heaven. The mind we can't see: that's what goes. We can't see the process of its going, but it's nevertheless capable of moving from place to place. The act of going to the good or bad destinations is entirely an affair of the heart and mind. This is why those who train their own hearts and minds are said truly to love themselves. Those who don't train their own hearts and minds are said to be in a place of darkness, or unawareness.

When the light of awareness, or cognitive skill, arises in the mind, the mind will have the arms, legs, hands, and eyes it needs to succeed in its aims. If it doesn't have this awareness, it's in so much darkness that it can't see anything at all. It has to depend totally on the body. But when you practice so as to give rise to the eye of the mind, you'll see that the body is one thing, the mind another. They're not one and the same. At the moment, our minds are still like children, which is why we have to depend on the body to be our guardian. But once the mind is trained, it will grow into an adult and be able to let go of the body. The nature of children is that they still have to depend on their guardians. But once a child is raised to adulthood, it can go out on its own without the guardian. There's no need to carry the child around any more. If we don't know how to train the mind, it'll simply stay at the childish level. The reason we all suffer so much in our lives is that our minds are still children.

This is why the Buddha taught us to find the Dhamma as a refuge or shelter for the mind. At present our minds don't have a home to stay in. No matter where we sit or lie down, the mind won't stay put. The only thing that does stay put is the body. And this is why the mind knows no happiness, like a person who always has to keep wandering without rest, tired and hot from the sun. The phrase, "home for the mind," here means the foundation of concentration. Just as a person with lots of possessions but no safe place to keep them can find no rest, in the same way people with no concentration -- the foundation for the mind -- can't find any peace no matter how many meritorious things they do. This is why we should train the mind to attain concentration. Training the mind is like eating a meal: when you've finished

eating, you have to wash the dishes and put them away in an orderly fashion, so that the next time you want to eat you'll have them right at hand. When we want to use the mind in any of our activities, we have to keep washing it and putting it in order in just the same way.

Tell yourself, while you're sitting here, that you're on your way to the shade of a Bodhi tree, i.e., the refuge of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. When you develop your inner goodness in this way, you can't entrust your mind to the world, to any people, or any material things at all. You're going to entrust it entirely to someone venerable. In other words, you keep your mind flowing in the recollection of the Buddha without getting snagged on anything else. Use your alertness to survey your heart and take the body as your playground. Keep mindfulness always in charge of the mind, thinking *bud-dho* with the in-and-out-breath. You know what the breath is like when it comes in; you know what it's like when it goes out. This is called getting established in the recollection of the Buddha. That's the first step.

The second step is to clean up the mind. You don't focus anything involved with the Hindrances, such as loving this person, hating that person, liking and disliking, good and bad. You have to be intent on releasing the mind from these things. In this way, the Dhamma will arise in the heart with a cool sense of relief. Then you can look at the cleanliness of the mind, to see whether the way you live from day to day is clean or not. Being unclean means having a mind mixed up with defilements. As you sit here calming the mind, don't go thinking about sights, sounds, smells, etc., in ways that lead to sensual desire, ill will, or thoughts of harmfulness. If greed arises, try to wash it away. Don't let it arise again. If anger arises, try to wash it away. Don't let it arise again. The same holds true with delusion. Try to chase out every form of evil.

This is called mental purity. Once the mind comes to a stop, that's when purity will arise -- like a traveler who stops and rests under the shade of a tree. His weariness will disappear, and he won't have any sweat. Passion, aversion, and delusion are like sweat that moistens and stains our mind. Whoever can stop sweating in this way -- by entering the shade of the Bodhi tree through practicing recollection of the Buddha -- will become clean like a person sitting under a tree. When the mind is established in good qualities, it'll be sheltered and at ease (this ease comes from stillness and calm). As the mind grows more and more clean, it will become as clear and transparent as water, giving rise to an inner brightness. Sometimes it's clean but not bright. In other words it keeps moving forward and back without staying in place. Once the mind is bright and clear, though, it'll give rise to awareness. *Cakkhum udapadi, ñānam udapadi, pañña udapadi vijja udapadi*: Vision arises, knowledge arises, discernment arises, awareness arises. You'll give rise to three eyes: the eye of the past is recollection of past lives, the eye of the future is knowledge of the death and rebirth of living beings, and the eye of the present is knowledge of the ending of mental fermentations. You'll be able to let go of all things poisonous. You won't be stuck on the past, present, or future at all.

This is why, when you develop concentration, you'll end up with three eyes. In other words, your outer left eye will see good things, your outer right eye will see bad things, and they'll send them in to the inner eye, which will remain at equilibrium. You'll also have three ears: Your outer left ear will hear praise, your outer right ear will hear criticism, and they'll send them in to the inner ear, which will stay at

equilibrium. This is how you can receive all the guests the world sends your way. As for the eye of the mind -- intuitive insight -- it'll receive your defilements. Once it really understands them, it'll be able to send them packing. That way you'll be able to live comfortably in the world, with nothing to disturb your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind. You'll meet with nothing but brightness and purity.

The mind that hasn't been trained is like a child. When it's trained, it turns into an adult. As for the body, which used to seem so large and mature, you'll now see that it's really a child. It's inconstant, stressful, and not-self. But the mind trained to the point of adulthood won't be troubled by these things. Even though the body is inconstant, inconstancy won't appear in the mind. Even though the body is stressful, stress won't appear in the mind. Even though the body is not-self, nothing troubling will appear in the mind. The mind will stay still and at equilibrium, equanimous, without latching onto any of these things at all.

Once the mind is trained to a point of real strength, it's able to let go of the body. For this reason, when we develop our goodness by practicing the recollection of the Buddha as our constant preoccupation, we'll reach the point where we can let go of all attachments. Our minds will enter the current of the Dhamma with true intuitive insight, and we'll ultimately meet with the brightness, coolness, and ease I've described.

Genuine Practice, Genuine Knowing

August 30, 1958

When you're sitting in concentration, don't think that you're sitting here in this meditation hall. Tell yourself that you're sitting alone, in the deep, deep forest. Cut away all your commitments and concerns. Don't think about the group or about anyone at all. Thoughts of what's good, what's bad, what you have or what you lack: you don't have to think them. Think just about what's in your body and establish your mindfulness exclusively on the breath. Or you can tell yourself that you're sitting face-to-face with the Buddha, so that you have to keep careful watch over the manners of the mind. Don't let it fidget around, picking its ears and nose, or scratching itself here and there. Keep the body straight and the mind focused steadily on the Buddha: i.e., exclusively on your meditation word, *buddho*. Be mindful with each and every in-and-out breath. Don't go slipping off anywhere else.

If you aren't genuinely intent on what you're doing, you're deceiving your teacher, deceiving the people around you, and deceiving yourself as well. The deceit here is that you close your eyes and act like you're in concentration, but the mind isn't still like the body. When this is the case, you'll suffer.

The results of not genuinely being intent are that things sometimes go well, sometimes they don't; sometimes you're aware, sometimes you're not. In other words, the good results you're looking for aren't constant. That's the first result. The second is absentmindedness. The mind thinks about other people,

other things, and doesn't stay with the body, doesn't stay with the present. You're like a person eating a meal. You intend for your hand to put rice in your mouth, but you gaze around absentmindedly. You think you're eating a spoonful of soup, but it turns out to be a spoonful of pepper sauce. You reach for a sweet but grab and bite into a clod of dirt or a piece of gravel instead. Or you can make a comparison with a blind person eating a meal. A person with good eyesight sends you your food, telling you that, "This is rice. This is curry. This is a sweet," but you don't take note of what she says and so you get them all mixed up. Then you go blaming her for your own absentmindedness.

The third result of not genuinely being intent is forgetfulness. You lose track of your mindfulness, lose track of the breath, lose track of yourself.

All three of these results are obstacles to the practice. They're signs of not being sincere in your duties.

There are two kinds of knowing: genuine knowing and deceptive knowing. Genuine knowing is what stays right here and now within you, without going anywhere else. You know when you're standing, you know when you're lying down, speaking, thinking, etc. As for deceptive knowing, that's the knowledge going after labels and perceptions. Labels are an act of knowing, but they're not the knowing itself. They're like the shadow of knowing. Genuine knowing is being mindful of the present, seeing causes and effects. This is discernment.

For this reason we should each try to train ourselves to give rise to discernment, the genuine knowing that won't deceive us into falling for a mass of suffering. We do this by training the mind to stay firmly in concentration, by being mindful and circumspect in our breathing, by being alert in our every movement, by being genuinely intent in our duties, and by showing respect for our teachers and for ourselves. These are the factors that will lead us to the happiness and wellbeing to which we aspire.

Living in Peace

August 24, 1957

The Dhamma is what gives peace, shelter, and happiness to the world. If the world were deprived of the Dhamma, we couldn't find any peace here at all. If people individually or as a group have the Dhamma constantly in their hearts, they're like fresh, green grass growing in a spring-fed meadow or mountain valley, constantly watered by the rain. If people lack the Dhamma -- if they're evil or unskillful in their behavior -- they're like grass in the dry season or in a desert, lying dead on the ground. They have nothing to attract the hearts of other people to like them or respect them. Instead, they'll simply get stepped all over and thrown away. They'll reap nothing but suffering and misfortune.

People with the Dhamma in their hearts are like trees whose flowers are beautiful and fragrant. Everyone

wants to be near them, to associate with them. As for people who are shoddy in their behavior, they're like the kind of tree whose flowers may be pretty but are surrounded by thorns, or have no fragrance, or are downright foul smelling. Other people are sure to detest them and won't want to come near.

The Dhamma can also be compared to the flame of a lantern, which by its nature is dazzling bright. Our mind is like the globe around the lantern. If the globe hasn't been washed and is covered with soot, then no matter how bright the light of the flame may be, it won't be able to radiate that brightness outside of the globe. In the same way, if our mind is clouded and obscured with evil intentions, then no matter how much good we try to do, it won't be clean or pure because our hearts are still soiled with defilements in the same way that the soot soils the globe of the lantern.

We've come to this place, which is a peaceful place, so we should try to be peaceful and pure in our behavior: pure in our words and deeds, and pure in our thoughts. When we're pure both inwardly and outwardly like this, we fit in with the peacefulness of the place.

Peace comes from causes and gives rise to results. If the causes aren't present, the results won't come. The kind of happiness coming from a lack of peacefulness lasts only as long as a quick catch in your breath. But the happiness coming from peace lasts for a long, long time. If where we live isn't peaceful, it won't help us benefit from our activities. For instance, if we want to read, write, or memorize a passage from a book, we'll have a hard time. This is why peacefulness is something very important that we should all work together to foster.

Our body is like a large water jar; the mind, like the water in the jar; and our defilements, like sediment in the water. If we take an alum crystal and swish it around in the water, the bits of sediment will gather as a precipitate on the sides or bottom of the jar, leaving the water clean and clear. The Dhamma is like an alum crystal that can make our minds clean and clear. When we listen to the Dhamma and take it home to ponder so as to benefit from it, it will filter out all our unskillful tendencies, which are defilements, so that they separate out as a precipitate in the mind. When the Dhamma stays with the mind in this way, then even when there are feelings of anger, we won't get angry along with them. When there are feelings of hatred, we won't get worked up along with them. When there are feelings of infatuation, we won't get infatuated along with them. But even so, these feelings are still lying in wait there in the mind, which is why we have to develop higher forms of goodness so as to remove the precipitates completely from our water jar.

The higher forms of goodness that we have to develop are the practices for giving rise to peace in the mind. When the heart is at peace, it gives rise to an inner quality within itself, in the same way that water allowed to sit still will become more clear. We people have three instigators within us: our eyes, our ears, and our mouth. This is on the physical level. On the mental level, the instigator within us is our heart. These are the things that create a lack of peace within us. So you have to be careful not to let poison into your system through any of these things. If you realize that you've ingested poison, you have to spit it out right away. Otherwise, it'll harm you. In other words, your eyes, ears, and mouth are areas where you have to exercise a lot of restraint.

Normally, our eyes are always looking for trouble, our ears are looking for trouble, and our mouth has a habit of saying things that cause trouble. To speak in ways that won't cause trouble requires wisdom and discernment. When you have discernment, then when you ingest good food, you won't be harmed. Even if you ingest poison, you won't die. The discernment I'm referring to here is knowledge of past lives, knowledge of how people die and are reborn, and the knowledge that puts an end to the fermentation of defilement in the heart. If you don't yet have these kinds of discernment, you have to be extra careful in looking after yourself, so that you can gain knowledge of what's skillful and what's not.

In looking after yourself, you have to (1) watch out for evil so that it doesn't arise; (2) watch out for your goodness so that it doesn't fall away; and (3) put your goodness to use so that it gives rise to benefits. When you speak, speak in a way that leads to peacefulness. If you speak in a way that gives rise to trouble, it's as if you had eaten poison. And in this way you harm not only yourself, but other people as well, in the same way as when you sprinkle poison in an aquarium of fighting fish. One fish bites another, so that the wound becomes poisoned, and when all the fish have bitten one another they end up floating dead like a raft on the surface of the water. So when you realize that you still have greed, anger, and delusion in your mind, you have to be extra careful in what you say. When you're mindful to speak only the things that should be said and hold back when you're about to say anything you shouldn't, you'll be looking out for your goodness to make sure it doesn't fall away, at the same time that you prevent evil from arising. In addition, you have to watch out for your ears. Sometimes other people speak with good intentions, but we hear them as bad. Sometimes we speak with good intentions, but other people misunderstand. When this is the case, it's no different from playing a flute in the ears of a water buffalo. It serves no purpose at all.

When we live together in a group like this, there are bound to be all kinds of sounds when we come into contact with one another. If you were to make a comparison, we're no different from an orchestra, which has to include the sound of the oboes, the sound of the gong, the sound of the xylophones, high sounds, low sounds, treble, and bass. If all the instruments had the same sound, there would be no fun in listening to the orchestra, for a one-sound orchestra wouldn't be pleasing at all. In the same way, when lots of people live together, there are bound to be good sounds and bad arising in the group. So each of us has to look after his or her own heart. Don't let yourself feel anger or dislike for the bad sounds, because when there's a lot of disliking it's bound to turn to anger. When there's a lot of anger, it'll turn to ill will. When there's ill will, it'll lead to quarrels and trouble.

For this reason we should spread thoughts of good will to people above us, below us, and on the same level. When people below us show disagreeable attitudes in their words or actions, we should forgive them. When we can do this, we'll be contributing to the peace and calm of the group.

Our human minds rarely have any time to rest and relax. We all have things we keep thinking about. You could say that ever since we've learned human language, we've kept on thinking without any time to stop and rest. The mind keeps itself busy until it dies. If our bodies were this industrious, we'd all be millionaires. But when the mind doesn't have any time to rest, it's filled with the Hindrances. That's why it knows no peace. So we're taught to practice concentration, letting go of thoughts about sensuality. In

other words, we close off our sense doors, so that the mind isn't involved with anything external, and we set our mind still and tall in the qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. We don't let it fall down into any sights, sounds, smells, tastes, or tactile sensations, which are sensual objects.

As for sensual defilements, we don't let the mind fall into passion, aversion, or delusion. Sometimes our concentration practice goes as we want it to, and we get pleased and oblivious. Sometimes it doesn't go as we'd like it to, and we get irritated and annoyed. These are cases of passion and aversion. As for delusion, sometimes when we sit we lose track of what we're doing or where we are. We get distracted or absentminded and don't know what's going on, good or bad, right or wrong. This causes the mind to become dark and obscure. Sometimes we drift off into thoughts of the past and think about people who have done us wrong, so that we fall into ill will, wanting to get revenge and to settle an old score. In this way we harm ourselves by spoiling our practice. All three of these defilements -- passion, aversion, and delusion -- are piles of dried timber just waiting to catch fire, so we have to clear them completely out of the heart.

Mindfulness and alertness are the quality of the Buddha. The cool sense of happiness they give is the quality of the Dhamma. If you can maintain that coolness until it hardens into a block of ice -- in other words, you make that goodness solid and strong in your heart -- that's the quality of the Sangha. Once you've got a solid block of goodness like this, you can pick it up and put it to any use you like. Whatever you say will give good results. Whatever you do will give good results. Your solid block of goodness will turn into a wish-fulfilling gem, bringing all sorts of happiness your way.

Feeding the Mind

August 10, 1957

When water is subjected to the heat of the sun or the heat of a fire to the point where it has evaporated away, leaving just the dry kettle or pot: can you say that that's the end of the water? Actually, it still exists, simply that the heat has turned it into a vapor that has dispersed into the air. So you can't say that the water no longer exists. It still exists somewhere else in another condition. The same holds true with the mind. When the body dies, the mind doesn't die along with it. It simply moves to a new place in line with your good or bad kamma. The fact that it still exists in another condition: that's what we mean when we say that it doesn't die.

Still, when it's subjected to a lot of fire, it degenerates. Just like the body: when the body is subjected to the fires of aging, illness, and death, it degenerates. When the mind is subjected to the fires of defilement -- passion, aversion, and delusion -- it degenerates. The more these three masses of flame burn away at the mind, the more it degenerates in terms of its goodness. It's because we have fire burning the body and the mind from both sides, that they end up having to fall apart and going their separate directions. This we call the process of birth and death.

So if you want happiness, you have to train the heart to get rid of its defilements. Only then will you be done with birth and death. But if you were to ask where that place of no birth and no death is located, it would be hard to point out. Just like pointing at an albino elephant or water buffalo to get a blind person to look at it: it would be a waste of effort. In the same way, describing the place of no birth and no death so that an ignorant person would understand it is a waste of time. Only when you develop discernment will you understand where people go after they die, and whether or not there's really a place of no birth and no death. This is because a person of discernment has an inner eye -- the *ñāṇa-cakkhu*, or eye of knowledge. What this means is that he or she has seen the true Dhamma. That's what gives such a person the ability to understand this issue. The Buddha said, "Whoever sees the Dhamma sees me." In other words, when we see the Dhamma that doesn't die, we'll be able to see those who don't die, what it is that doesn't die. So when we reach the Dhamma that doesn't die, we meet with the place that doesn't die. As long as we haven't met with that place, we have to keep practicing so as to give rise to the eye of the mind.

The problem is that even though most of us have clear eyesight, our minds are still dark and blurry. The Dhamma of the Buddha that we're taught every day is like a lens for casting some light into the eye of the mind, so that we can feel our way along without falling into pits or wells. Even then, though, our minds are still blurry. This is why we have so many differing opinions: our eyes are still blurry -- but at least we're not blind. We can still see vague shapes and shadows.

There's a saying: *samaṇaṇca dassanam etam-mangalamuttamam*. "Seeing a contemplative is the highest blessing." What this means is that whoever sees a noble one -- a stream-enterer, a once-returner, a non-returner, or an arahant -- sees a grand auspicious sight. But you really have to see a genuine noble one for this to be true. So where are you going to look for a noble one? What sorts of features help you recognize a noble one? If you look at a noble one from the outside, there's no way you can know for sure. The only way to know for sure is to practice the Dhamma so as to give rise to the qualities of a noble one within yourself. As long as you don't have those qualities within you, you can't see a genuine noble one. Your eyes are still blurry, so everything you see is blurry. Your mind is an ordinary mind, so everywhere you look, all you can see are ordinary people.

To help us see the truth in this way, the Buddha teaches three guidelines for practice:

- 1) *mattaññuta ca bhattasmim* -- having a sense of moderation in consuming food;
- 2) *pantaṇca sayanasanam* -- delighting in seclusion;
- 3) *adhicitte ca ayogo* -- being committed to the heightened mind, i.e. heightening the happiness of the mind.

With regard to the first guideline -- having a sense of moderation in consuming food -- there are two kinds of consumption: consuming food for the body and consuming food for the mind. Two sorts of food for the body should be avoided: anything that's been obtained through bad kamma, and anything that doesn't really nourish the body. When you avoid these two sorts of food, that's called having a sense

of moderation in consuming food.

As for food for the mind, there are three kinds:

- 1) *phassahara*, the food of sensory contact, i.e., the contact of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and ideas as they strike against the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind;
- 2) *viññānahara*, the food of consciousness, i.e., awareness at the six sense doors; and
- 3) *mano-sañcetanahara*, the food of mental intentions, i.e., setting the mind on an object.

A person without a sense of moderation in food is like an ill person who doesn't know what foods will aggravate his illness. He's bound to have a short life and an early death. Not only that, he also creates burdens for the people around him: his parents, spouse, children, and relatives. They're put to all sorts of trouble. When he dies, they have to find the money to pay for the funeral and make merit to dedicate to him. Before he dies, they have to pay for medical care. The doctors and nurses have to look after him until way late into the night, giving him medicine, cleaning up his urine and feces, all kinds of things. But if you gain a sense of how to look after yourself and are careful about how you consume your food, you'll have few diseases. You yourself will be at ease, and the people around you won't be burdened.

The five Hindrances are like germs. If they get established in your heart, they'll multiply and spread and eat away at your heart continually, to the point where your mind falls to such a low level that you can't lift it up again.

The food of consciousness means the consciousness at the six sense doors that arises when sights strike the eyes, sounds strike the ears, and so forth. Pleasing sights are like sugar, molasses, or honey, which are sure to be teeming with ants, gnats, and flies. Disagreeable sights are like filth: In addition to carrying germs, they're sure to attract all sorts of other bad things, too, because they're crawling with flies and worms. If we don't notice the ants, flies, and filth, we'll go ahead and eat the food -- and it will be toxic to our health. Like a person without any teeth who finds chicken bones in his food: he can't chew them, so he tries to swallow them whole and ends up with his eyes bulging out of their sockets. If you aren't discerning, you'll gobble down the filth together with the worms and smelly parts, and the sugar together with the ants and flies.

So you have to pay careful attention. Before you eat, look to see what you can handle and what you can't, what you have to be wary of and what you don't. This is called having a knife and a chopping board for your food. When you examine things for yourself in this way, you'll get to eat food that's well prepared and cooked -- not like a monster that eats things raw. If you don't examine things, you'll misunderstand what's happening, thinking that good things are bad, and bad things are good. The mind won't be clear about these things because you lack mindfulness and discernment. You'll swallow toxic food right into your heart. This is called being very greedy, very deluded, because you're careless in your eating, and this creates hazards for your heart.

The same holds true with the food of ear-consciousness. The sounds you like are like sugar or delicious sweets. The sounds you don't like are food that's rotten and spoiled. If you don't use discernment, don't use restraint, and don't pay proper attention, you'll end up eating food that's all rotten and wormy. Whatever's sweet you'll swallow down whole, and all the ants, worms, and flies will go down with it. This will cause pain and trouble for your intestines, and turmoil for your heart. Your heart is already in poor health, and yet you go gobbling down things that are toxic. When this happens, no one can cure you but you yourself.

The same thing applies in the area of the nose, tongue, body, and mind. Whatever food you plan to swallow, you first have to pay careful attention, as monks do when they chant the passage for reflection before using any of the four requisites. At the same time, we have to reflect on whether the person bringing us these things suffers from wrong views and practices wrong livelihood as well. Otherwise, our own virtues will be compromised.

So we have to be firmly intent, using mindfulness to gain evidence, and our discernment to pass judgment. That way we'll get to eat food that's just and fair. Anyone who doesn't use mindfulness and discernment is like an ogre that eats dead things, rotten things, and raw. Bones, wings, skins, and feathers: everything you swallow right down, like a savage who doesn't know any better.

Scientists nowadays are smart. They can take things you normally couldn't eat and then distil and process them so that you can eat them, and they're good for you, too. People without discernment, who allow themselves to get overcome with greed and hunger, will eat everything: wings, tails, bones, fins. The things they like get stuck in their hearts. The things they don't like get stuck in their hearts. Wherever they go, it's as if they have bones stuck in their throats. But if we have virtue, concentration, and discernment in our consumption of the food of consciousness, it's as if we have a fire, a stove, and a knife to prepare our food the right way.

The next kind of food is the food of mental intentions. If we set our hearts on the wrong things, it can be toxic to us. If you sit here thinking about someone you hate or who makes you angry, telling yourself that if you meet that person you'll have to say this or that, this is called setting your heart on the wrong object. If you set your heart on the right things, it will flow in the right direction. Forgetfulness and delusion won't be able to arise. For instance, you can think about the virtues or the generosity you've practiced, or about your teachers. This is called setting your heart on the right object. The heart will begin to blossom. Just like the people in the time of the Buddha: when their hearts were inclined toward recollection of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, they entered the refuge of the noble attainments. For this reason we should incline our hearts toward the people or things that will cause our hearts to flourish and grow. This is what will give them the strength they need to gain release from the Hindrances, which are like curtains of fog, or like worms that swarm over and eat away at the heart. This is what will give us the strength to shoot our way up to the paths and fruitions leading to nibbana. In this way we'll be good cooks for ourselves. But if we don't know how to chop, boil, or fry our own food, we'll have to eat it raw, just like a monster.

The third mouthful of food is the food of contact. Whatever sights come in by way of the eyes, whatever sounds come in by way of the ears, whatever smells comes in by way of the nose, and so forth, you have to be careful. Pay attention at all times to whatever will be of use, and avoid anything poisonous.

Whatever will be meritorious or skillful, even if it may be painful, you have to endure and stick with it, as when you have to endure heat, cold, or rain in the practice. As for anything that will be unskillful, you have to shake it right off. The same applies to the ideas that make contact in the mind. When you can act in this way, good food will keep flowing in to benefit your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body, and will seep in to bathe your heart. You'll be secluded from evil, secluded from defilements. *Adhicitte ca ayogo*: You'll be committed to the heightened mind. Mind states heading to the level of the lower realms will disappear, and those of the noble ones will arise in their place. The mind will be in a firm steady state, heading straight for nibbana. That's how it gets beyond the reach of the fires that consume the cosmos.

See also: [Starting Out Small](#)

Revised: Fri 27-Aug-2004

<http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/thai/lee/startsmall2.html>